

A close-up, low-angle photograph of a man with long, dark dreadlocks. He is wearing a dark jacket over a white shirt and is playing a violin. His eyes are closed, and his expression is one of intense focus. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on his face and the instrument, and deep shadows elsewhere. The background is dark and out of focus.

# STRATA

EDITION THREE 2011

Tasmania's visual & performing arts press



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## To Web, or not to Web?

words: Dr Kim Lehman

# An online presence for visual artists

I have just had a look at Antony Gormley's website ([www.antonygormley.com](http://www.antonygormley.com)). Why would Antony Gormley want (or need) to have a website you might ask? He certainly doesn't need it to make him famous. Sure, it is rather good—stylish, a minimalist look, quite technically flash but not overly tizzy, clearly put together by quality designers and programmers. And it has plenty of images of his work, his exhibitions and his essays. Indeed, it has as much as you might find on the Gormley Wikipedia entry, without the verbosity and inaccuracies.

That last throw away statement is the point. The big difference between [antonygormley.com](http://antonygormley.com) and the Wikipedia entry is that [antonygormley.com](http://antonygormley.com) is a Gormley production, it is the 'official' website, it is the artist's own version of himself.

So, at this super brand level of artist there is a desire to tell your own story, and to have at least one online version of

yourself that you can control, because you certainly can't control much else on the Web. What about artists without this level of recognition though?

Well, even for artists with gallery representation a personal website can be valuable—many, of course, leave websites up to their gallery. But, on your own website you can show things like career progression... what I did 5 years ago, what I am preoccupied with now. In essence you can provide those interested in your work with more than they could get from random online articles, and it's in your own 'words'. You can also use a website as an archive of your work. Curators, gallerists, and collectors may well come across this information (how they find it is another matter) which could well lead to exhibition or sales opportunities.


Is all this marketing yourself? Maybe, but I'd argue that for artists it is about participating in the wider arts community, and about connecting to your audience. Both are concepts relevant to all

artists. And websites are just a tool to use along the way. Okay then, what about websites for emerging artists?

In some way websites are almost the standard these days. But really, should you, the emerging artist, have a website to promote yourself? I'm not going to answer that, but I will ask a question: Where do you want to go with your art? —think about what you want to achieve: commercial 'success', critical 'success', or personal expression. Answering this question will help—do you really need, or want, a website? Despite the widespread opinion to the contrary, not everyone needs a website. Many artists have productive lives without an online presence. It is not compulsory!

But, let's say you decide to have a website. You now need to ask a couple more key questions... Who is it for—other artists, commercial galleries, exhibition curators? What do you want to say or do—show images, have an online resume, publish your manifesto? Is it for sales or self-promotion?

Whether for sales or to get your name out there, it is important to remember that websites need to be professional looking. That doesn't mean they need to be filled with technical fabulousness either! But when you think about it, you are presenting yourself as a person active in some way in the visual arts, so you really, really need to concern yourself with how your website looks. Remember, we are talking about an online representation of you!

That sort of brings me back to Antony Gormley... I think that websites are part of you being in control of your image, your art and your career. They are not really about some automatic, direct route to fame, fortune and an invite to represent Australia at the next Venice Biennale. Though, of course, that would be rather nice! 

Dr Kim Lehman lectures in marketing at the University of Tasmania, researching in the arts and cultural sectors. As a writer he has published both short stories and social commentary, and has exhibited as a visual artist.